

Guy and Amy's Story

by Roland Foster

[The death of a dearly beloved spouse or child is a terrible thing. Whether it happens by degrees, as with Alzheimer's or ALS, or suddenly, as with a heart attack or accident, it can be devastating. When it happens to you, how will you deal with it? Will you think it is an aberration, something abnormal? Will you curse God for allowing it to happen? Or will you understand that death is the normal end of earthly life, and the door to something better? Will you trust God's provision for your loved one, to death and beyond?]

This story is true. Guy and Amy are not actual individuals, but they represent couples I have known who have gone through this kind of experience. I hope you will look beyond their pain and discover the joy of their trust in God.]

When we married, in our early twenties, we were as starry-eyed as anyone. "Until death us do part" was in our vows, but not much in our thoughts. Death was a foreign concept for us, and we expected it to remain so. "Someday," we admitted, but that someday was far off in the unimaginable future. I remember Amy remarking once or twice, "I hope I die first. I wouldn't want to suffer the pain of your dying, or having to live for years after you're gone." Not knowing what to say, I said nothing, and we left it there.

But we had a life to live, and we did. We had our share of trials, I suppose — shaky finances a time or two as I lost one job and looked for another; a baby that died and another that needed an operation to save her life; dealing with the decline and death of all four parents. There were enough joys, and more, to offset the trials — my employment, which provided enough for our needs and many small indulgences; our loving relationships with our son and daughter, who grew up to be fine, responsible adults, happily married and bringing forth grandchildren; the settled pleasures of life together as we entered our retirement years. After 45 years of wonderful companionship, we were well content.

When Amy first began to show signs of forgetfulness, we thought nothing of it. I had been getting more forgetful for years; now she was proving to be as humanly fallible as the rest of us. Gradually she got worse, to the point where she sometimes forgot how many grandchildren she had. That was scary! We consulted our doctor, then a specialist, and got the dreadful news: Alzheimer's.

We talked about it. We cried together, because we were hurt and scared. We had found God early in our marriage, or He had found us, and now we prayed hard together for a miracle, knowing all the while that it was not to be. Not that our faith was weak; but our faith in God allowed us to see that this was all part of His plan for our life together. Yes, it was hard to accept, and anger sometimes had its way for a while, but as we prayed and asked for grace and strength, we received peace. It became clear that the three of us — Amy, Guy, and God — were in this situation together, all the way.

"Don't leave me, Guy," Amy said only once. I held her hand and looked deep into her troubled eyes. "You know I never will," I replied.

It was harder emotionally at first, when Amy realized what was happening to her. She would get so frustrated with herself, and it sometimes made her uncharacteristically irritable. Later on she was more docile, childlike, wandering around the house and looking at things she had had for forty years as if she didn't know what they were. As she didn't, of course. My greatest fear then was that she would wander off, as she started to do a few times. Still later, she became like a toddler, then an infant. The job of keeping her out of trouble and caring for her physical needs took all of my time and energy. I thanked God constantly that I was healthy and strong, even as I saw my strength waning and my health beginning to decline.

Finally the day of utter heartbreak arrived. I could no longer take care of Amy, even with part time help from a local hospice group. I had to put her in a nursing home. The people there were pleasant and caring, but of course they didn't love Amy as I did. I worried that she might not get all the care she needed.

Strangely enough, the change seemed to cause some improvement in her condition. Her occasional lucid moments had gotten rarer, and seemed to have stopped altogether, but in the nursing home, she now occasionally recognized me. This was a mixed blessing, though, because she would either beg me to take her home, or berate me, with hard words and even profanity, for leaving her there. After each such occasion I hated to go back the next day, but of course I did.

On my last visit, the Lord gave us a beautiful blessing, that took away the pain of every harsh word we had ever said to each other. As I held her hand, knowing her struggle was almost over, I quietly thanked God for our life together. She opened her lovely eyes, and I could see that she was with me again. She smiled, looking right into my eyes, and whispered, "Thank you." I said, "I love you." She smiled again and closed her eyes.

Now that Amy's with Jesus, I can see things a little more clearly than when she was sick. I can see what her illness cost us. Our dream for our declining years together — that gradual fading away into the sunset — did not happen. Would we have enjoyed it? Yes, indeed, we loved our life together.

I can also see how much we gained. What love was poured out when Amy confidently entrusted her whole self into my care, knowing that somehow, with God's help, I was going to be faithful to that trust! What love was poured out through me as I cared for her, right to the end of my strength! How richly we were blessed, to be vessels of that love.

I would never choose what happened, but neither would I change it if I could. God knows best.